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ABSTRACT

This document contains four papers from a symposium on adult learning issues and human resource development (HRD). "Creating a Systemic Framework for the Transfer of Learning from an Action Learning Experience" (Suzanne D. Butterfield, Kitty Gold, Verna J. Willis) discusses a study of the organizational elements that affect learning and transfer of learning in the organization. "Verifying Themes in Action Learning: Implications for Adult Education and HRD" (Verna J. Willis, Jennifer Deans, Harold Jones) is the report of a follow-up telephone survey of 14 HRD graduate students who pioneered action learning at a southeastern university during 2 quarters in 1996. "Commitment of Action Learners in an Unfamiliar Setting to Clients, Other Set Members, and the AL (Adult Learning) Process Itself" (Verna J. Willis, Robert L. Dilworth) describes how five diverse action learning sets worked with manager-clients of a university hospital in the United Kingdom to help resolve serious dilemmas posed by merger, reorganization of services, and facility closing. A model of how an individual's perspective changes as the individual becomes a team member and as the team progresses through action learning is proposed in "Cognitive Frame Phrases in an Action Reflection Learning(TM) Program" (ARL[TM] Inquiry). (MN)

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18 **Action Learning Issues**

Chair: Paul Brauchle, Illinois State University

Creating a Systemic Framework for the Transfer of Learning from an Action Learning Experience

Suzanne D. Butterfield, Georgia State University
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Verifying Themes in Action Learning: Implications for Adult Education and HRD

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Harold Jones, Metropolitan Life

Commitment of Action Learners in an Unfamiliar Setting to Clients, Other Set Members, and the AL Process Itself

Verna J. Willis, Georgia State University
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Cognitive Frame Phases In An Action Reflection Learning™ Program

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Creating a Systemic Framework for the Transfer of Learning from an Action Learning Experience

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Action learning is a method of learning in groups while solving real problems to bring about learning and organizational change. It builds new relationships among organizational members and organizational elements. The research questions herein seek to describe those organizational elements that affect learning and the transfer of learning in the organization. This study identified patterns that emerged from the research and identified directions for future research about transfer of learning from an action learning experience.

Many influences related to the individual and his/her workplace can promote, deter, or filter the acquisition and transfer of new knowledge. This has been well documented in the research on transfer of training. Education programs are not successful and individuals may not be motivated to learn or to apply new knowledge if they are not aware of and in a position to capitalize on, manage, or neutralize these influences. Action learning is a nontraditional more open framework of learning with nontraditional, and possibly latent and/or intangible outcomes. This can result in problems when trying to use newly-learned action learning principles in an organization. As a result, the transfer of learning can be more unpredictable, complicated, and potentially threatening. Meaningful transfer of knowledge gained through action learning, however, can be more rewarding, boundaryless, and generalizable than conventional classroom training for the participant and for the respective organization.

Theoretical framework

Several theory bases seem to be useful for looking at the subject of transfer of learning and this study of graduate students in an action learning experience. These are action learning itself, transfer of training, systems thinking, and organizational behavior.

Action Learning. As originally proposed by Reginald Revans (1971, 1982), action learning is a framework wherein individuals learn best from each other while working on significant, real-life problems through questioning insight and programmed knowledge (traditional instructor-centered learning only as ancillary assistance). Insightful questioning relates to Revans' "fresh questions" which are probing questions to stimulate creativity, discovery, re examination of underlying assumptions, and experimentation. Programmed knowledge is information that is generally accepted to be true. Subsequently, Marsick (1991) emphasized the role of critical reflection in the action learning framework. Learning occurs in facilitated or unfacilitated action learning sets (groups), meeting periodically over several months to identify and resolve the problem brought forth by a participant who is responsible for and can do something about it. In between set meetings, problem owners test out new knowledge gained from the set, monitor results, and engage in critical reflection to appraise the results. The benefit of action learning occurs by balancing learning, problem solving, and the application and transfer of learning. As a result, action learning is a powerful personal, professional, and organizational development methodology which *reaches* beyond one's conscious belief and knowledge awareness through critical reflection. It challenges one's assumptions about pre existing theories of his/her world.

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Considering the rate of change in our world, what we knew yesterday may not resolve today's problems but instead disrupt the system's steady state. Therefore, action learners continuously questions their own and others' expertise, resulting in continuous learning. It provides a framework to use across a variety of problems and disciplines.

Transfer of Training. As defined by Broad and Newstrom, transfer of training is "the effective and continuing application, by trainees to their jobs, of the knowledge and skills gained in training -- both on and off the job" (1992, p. 6). They additionally asserted that HRD professionals express great concern that most investments in training do not generate sustained positive transfer of new knowledge to the job. Baldwin and Ford proposed that "For transfer to have occurred, learned behavior must be generalized to the job context and maintained over a period of time on the job." (Baldwin & Ford, 1988, p. 63).

Transfer of learning from an action learning experience is the specific issue explored in this study. With the exception of ARL™ Inquiry (1996), there has been little research with this specific focus. Previous research efforts related to the transfer of training (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Cormier & Hagman, 1987; Dweck, 1986; Huczynski & Lewis, 1980; Jeris, May & Redding, 1996) have been instrumental in providing a knowledge base (related to conventional training) from which to springboard to the subject of transfer of nontraditional learning from an action learning experience.

Systems Thinking. General systems theory provides a framework within which to study an organization, the organization's environment, and its interactive elements. More specifically, a systems thinker views an organization (system) and its environment holistically with interrelated and interdependent elements. These elements together effect some result synergistically greater than the total of its elements acting singularly or simultaneously (Checkland, 1972). A disturbance (i.e. the introduction of something new) from within or outside the system can influence another element and can cause ripples throughout the entire system. Additionally, Zulauf (1995) suggests that systems thinkers would not limit themselves to just one cause of a problem. They would survey all possible causal elements of a problem otherwise perceived as distinct phenomena to more fully understand the system. This notion relates to the systems theory concept of equifinality suggested by von Bertalanffy (1969). In effecting any change or resolving any problem, the whole system must be considered (Flood, 1995). Checkland presented the concept of "appreciative systems" (1972, p. 56) whereby individuals develop, through experience, a readiness to be keenly observant to specific or anomalous situations within a system in order to resolve disturbances to sustain the system's steady state.

As it relates to human resource development, McLagan (1989) suggested that general system theory is a significant framework for the human resources developer to provide a holistic approach to building knowledge into the parts of the system versus a limited discipline-specific approach. It allows for the consideration of the goals, values, and other attributes of the system, its individuals, its environment, and its reciprocal nature as a framework for constructing development activities. Willis (1997) defines the field of HRD itself as an evolutionary system.

The final concept within systems theory considered in this study is that of "purpose". Bertalanffy (1969) stated that all systems have a purpose or a goal to strive to attain. This purpose is what provides the system its vitality and its dynamic homeostasis for improvement and growth.

Organizational behavior Bolman and Deal's (1991) four organizational frames were used to examine the system as a whole. These organizational frames, developed from significant organizational theory and research are: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Bolman and Deal developed these four frames to provide organizational members with different perspectives from which to view phenomenon within their systems. These frames provide the guidance for organizational members to stretch out of their comfort zone to examine phenomena from a different perspective.

The structural frame refers to the context within which organizational members work. It is concerned with the division of labor (the definition and coordination of work), efficiency, authority, hierarchy, and rational behavior.

The human resource frame refers to the characteristics, traits, personality, and personal agendas of organizational members. It also refers to the members' technical ability, learning ability, needs, motivation, emotions, and sense of job security. Career opportunities, incentives (or lack thereof), goal congruence and "fit" with the organization are also paramount.

The political frame refers to how different groups vie for and use power and the organization's scarce resources. Included in this is how coalitions develop to accomplish goals,

influence as a part of the white space of the organization chart, informal leadership, identification of scarce resources, conflict, and human cost.

The symbolic frame refers to how organizations operate based upon the meaning of subcultures, rituals, ceremonies, stories, and heroes (tribal phenomena) rather than bureaucratic determinants. Bolman and Deal asserted that organizational members often tend to use this frame to mediate or deal with complexity and ambiguity or to avoid facts and logic. These four frames, then, provide the systemic framework from which to explore the elements that influence an individual's motivation to learn about action learning, to apply it to resolve an intractable problem, and then to apply the framework of action learning to other business operations/problems.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to collect preliminary data on the acquisition of new knowledge and translation of learning from an action learning experience. Guiding questions were: 1) What types of learning are identified in an action learning experience? 2) Within the framework of Bolman and Deal's four organizational frames, what do the action learners think they can carry back to use in their organizational lives? and 3) Within the framework of Bolman and Deal's four organizational frames, what are the elements that deter and/or enhance the translation of learning from an action learning experience?

Methodology

Participants. Twelve graduate students in a university action learning class served as a purposive sample of professionals in this study. The professional background of these individuals were varied. The participants worked in school systems, other universities, or major corporations in various capacities. Additionally, the participants were either master or doctoral students, with diverse educational backgrounds.

Data Collection. One of the assignments for this class was to participate in one of three action learning sets with an external problem owner/client with a significant operating issue. The problem owners consisted of a member of management from a power company, a member of management from a bank, and a member of one of the branches of the armed forces.

Participants completed three questionnaires during the quarter while participating in the class and their action learning sets, with the final questionnaire administered during the final week of the quarter. Questions related to motivation for taking and learning in the class, action learning behaviors that the participants believed that they could engage in, and organizational elements that the participants believed deterred or facilitated the use of action learning principles.

Data Analysis. The responses were collectively analyzed by the three author/researchers. General patterns were identified with concentration placed on those that related to the above-mentioned research questions. Responses were then grouped under headings identified for these patterns.

Preliminary Results and Conclusions

First Research Question. The major elements related to the first research question involve the participants' motivation to take the action learning class and to learn in this class. For both, the search for a new, universally applicable mental model and/or technique was the pattern around which the responses were clustered. The respondents cited curiosity about learning in nontraditional ways, action integrated with learning, and the freedom to learn. It was clear from their responses that the participants were seeking either a model or technique that was very different from what they normally encounter in their organizations, and one which could overarch all facets of organizational life. Representative comments were:

> In my organization, change is being thrust upon us and organization members are learning [that] the accepted, traditional ways of operating are not always the best.

> ...I saw immediate application to my organization and to me personally as a person and as a member of the organization. I thought it would teach me how to help others question their own thinking. I thought it would help me question mine. I thought that I might be able to engage groups of key problem solvers in my organization in an approach to thinking and asking, learning - that truely led to new approaches.

An unexpected finding was that several of the participants became curious to enroll and were motivated to learn because of other action learning leaders and peer graduate students. Some were motivated by previous action learning seminars (the 1997 AHRD pre-conference and Georgia State University seminars).

Regarding the types of learning that occurred, two types were cited. The first related to the principles of action learning. The most cited principle was that individuals can best resolve their problems through questioning insight instead of reliance on "P" (expertise and programmed knowledge); that sometimes "P" is irrelevant. This is exhibited by these comments:

> ... organizations are so into "P" for solving their problems, that they lose sight of the "Q" -- the questioning that is so desperately needed in order to solve real problems in real time. "P" is yesterday's news, but "Q" gets you to the point of change at present--what's happening now.
> In my organization we are afflicted with too many experts who have done things the same way for decades... Action learning provides us a golden opportunity to look at change from non-expert eyes. This is what my organization has needed for some time.

> When I do not have to be the expert, I create my best work. ... By being a non-expert I put less pressure on myself, allowing me to be more productive...

> When do I assume the expert [role], which limits my capacity to learn, change, and grow?

Some of the participants remarked that when they recognized the over-reliance on expertise, they were then able to more clearly understand and see the need for "fresh questions," the next most cited principle of action learning.

Recognizing the power of learning to use insightful questions was discussed by the majority of the participants. Asking fresh, insightful questions was also the one action that the participants felt that they could immediately start doing in both their personal and professional lives. The purpose was to re examine the value of expertise and programmed knowledge and to get at heart of some issue of concern to them. Some representative comments were:

> ... action learning works well by asking questions and generating thoughts which may reach deeper into the eye of the problem.

> ... not always easy to stay out of the expert role. Refraining from giving advice and probing a problem owner to question different angles takes restraint and constant reflection.... A "foolish" question from one set member may spark a new perspective in the problem owner's mind.

> Questions that lead to learning can't be questions that lead to one answer. The questions that lead to learning are those that stimulate thinking and that stimulate questions.

> From this trust will hopefully come the real questioning and insight that needs to happen in order to get at the real problem and at the ... solution.

> Within my own organization I realized that I should stop being such the expert and start asking more questions.

The second type of learning was about the self. These were sometimes referred to as "breakthrough," with some being intensely personal. This type of learning generally clustered around a new awareness of the impact of reactions and interaction; assumptions; ethics; and the liberation from canned or programmed viewpoints and problem solving. Examples of this are:

> One significant discovery has been the extent to which my own assumptions, frame of reference, and world view impact how I approach problems ... But I find that my level of awareness about this has been increased, and I've become more reflective about what I say and what I think and why. I also find I want to ask others what's "behind" the statements they make.
>
> I am also learning more about my reactions during set meetings and how they can affect the questioning, interaction between other group members.
>
> Action learning is a great way to really re-evaluate ones self--your actions, ideas, and beliefs. It has helped me to focus in more on what I believe, while teaching me that what I believe should be questioned (often) and that my opinion is not necessarily the only or right opinion.
>
> One significant discovery ... has been about my own values and ways of looking at situations or tasks. Much of my career has required me to learn models and techniques causing me to look at problems in a linear fashion. Action learning has freed me from this programmed box to view a problem in a less structured manner.
>
> I saw a pattern in my mental model that I really was not consciously aware of before. I realized how much of my life and adult relationships were influenced by it. It was a sobering insight, yet freeing in that I saw where I had responsibility and played a part.

It appears that the greatest learning occurred as a collaborative effort (both in the classroom as a set and during the client action learning set meetings) – a shared learning. This appeared to develop into trust which participants believed to lead to insightful questioning and real breakthrough. In general, the most profound comments related to personal learning issues.

Second and Third Research Questions. These questions related to what the action learners think they can transfer to their organizations and what they consider to be barriers and facilitators in their efforts. Participants generally recognized ways that they could champion and model the principles of action learning in their organizational and personal lives. These ways ranged from informal activities within their own departments to formal inclusion in management development programs. The majority of the participants believed they could immediately start to create an action learning environment within their own work groups by assuming a non-expert role and asking fresh questions instead of just giving out answers.

Structural frame. The following organizational characteristics were cited as important to consider for informal and/or formal translation of action learning: the rigidity/flexibility of the organization, size, hierarchy, rate of innovation, rules, policies, significance of the problem, and use of committees/staff meetings. The more rigid a structure with centralized decision-making, the more difficult it would be to implement action learning. A smaller size organization or scope of implementation may facilitate its implementation. One respondent felt she could implement action learning because her organization was small; another felt she could implement action learning in "pockets" because her organization has a management development program developed around unfamiliar problem solving.

The structural frame also concerns organizational members' roles in the organization. Several participants responded that they now wanted to modify others' expectations of their roles from the expert with the right answers to "an empathetic listener and ignorant questioner". These respondents believed that asking fresh questions would stimulate the problem owner to solve his/her own problem. Additionally, one participant noted that the military could conduct action learning projects with no displays of rank to facilitate the process.

The relative importance of the problem (the need) to the organization's goals and the desire to change were seen as critical by some of the participants. These respondents believed that the best opportunity for using action learning was when changes were being forced upon them from external sources and when the problem situation was in a crisis state. The organizational focus on quick fixes and fast results was emphasized by the majority of the participants as a major barrier to implementation and translation of action learning.

Human Resources Frame. The participants generally appeared to achieve validation for or breakthrough to their belief that other organizational members are responsible for solving their own problems. Over the period of the class quarter, the participants more fully perceived their role as asking insightful questions to help others to solve their own problems. The organizational elements that facilitate this are the freedom for members to act and make decisions, a reward system that encourages and rewards innovation, a participative culture, suspension of disbelief, and information distribution about action learning. Barriers noted were self-limiting behavior, dominance of expertise and programmed knowledge, limited opportunity for and expectation that employees think and experiment, the tendency to hide problems instead of confronting them, and punishing mistakes.

Political Frame. The majority of the participants noted the importance of obtaining upper management support for formal usage of action learning principles. Other issues of concern were: upper management's openness and willingness to release control and decision making and organizational members' willingness to take risks to expose problems that may have negative effects on them. One participant was particularly sensitive to postponing an introduction of action learning until the "right" problem owner surfaced.

Symbolic Frame. As it relates to this study, this frame represents how organizational members place meaning on events or phenomena. Specifically, several participants commented on some of the traditions of their own and others' organizations (success stories) and how these would impact the use of action learning. Some commented that because the organization used some of the principles of action learning (without knowing it), action learning might be more readily accepted. Cited were: the use of non-expert committees and staff meetings to solve problems and questioning of past practices. Several participants also remarked that the knowledge of successes of other organizations using action learning would be extremely important in implementing action learning in their own organizations.

Discussion

This particular study originated to investigate contextual learning and what organizational elements deterred or facilitated transfer of that learning to the workplace. Many of the remarks, and the most impressive, related to personal learning and overcoming one's own barriers and dissonant mental models. It appeared this had to be done before the participants were able to moderate the barriers and capitalize upon the facilitating elements of the organization to use action learning principles successfully in the workplace. Action learning, in effect, had to become a way of personal way to life - almost a value before it could be effectively translated to the workplace according to a majority of the participants. The overriding belief at the end of the study was that others do have responsibility for solving their own problems. The participants saw their new role as supporting others by modeling action learning principles, liberating them from having to be the expert with all the "canned" answers.

Another major theme emerged from the data. Most of the participants cited the lack of adequate time because of the extensive focus on quick results as a barrier to formally implementing action learning in an organization. However, most of these same participants indicated that they could immediately engage in it in informal ways. As a result, there may be more value (and immediate value) to action learning than previously thought.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This preliminary study sought only to identify the types of learning and organizational elements that deter or facilitate the translation of action learning. There has been little research related to these topics. Future research studying a larger number of subjects and over a longer period of time would provide a greater depth of clarification and understanding. Future research could more fully

explore the personal phenomena identified in this study as this appeared to be of utmost concern to the majority of the participants. Further study of the identified organizational elements would provide action learners with guidance and insights to overcome barriers and capitalize on facilitators to enhance systemic organizational change and organizational learning. Finally, further study could explore the ways and successes of action learners who informally use action learning principles in their organizations.

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Verifying Themes in Action Learning: Implications for Adult Education and HRD

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Fourteen HRD graduate students were pioneers in action learning at a Southeastern University during two quarters in 1996. Participants kept journals and wrote course-end essays identifying themes they found pertinent in their experience. In this analysis, follow-up telephone surveys and interviews were used to investigate the perceived durability of action learning and the current insights participants have about the personal and process themes they identified earlier.

When they have drawn to a close, action learning sets are rarely revisited, resulting in a gap in our understanding of "what really happened." The need for investigating set outcomes, particularly from the individual and long-term learning perspective, has been identified earlier (Dilworth & Willis, 1997). A clearer understanding of action learning may have potential for transforming teaching practice in adult education and training.

Although it is common procedure in qualitative research to conduct "member checks" after data collection, returning to information sources to verify the data they provided, the events and experiences of action learners are not necessarily recorded, and if recorded, are not necessarily rechecked and verified at a later date. This follow-up study reports such a revisitation and compares self-report data gathered immediately after their learning experience in 1996 to perceptions they now have, more than a year after the learning set activity.

The study brings together for the first time salient action learning start-up data for this university and submits it to participant review. However, some of the striking initial findings from the participant essays have been referenced earlier (Dilworth & Willis, 1997; Willis, 1998). The study at this university has helped to inform a larger undertaking: the analysis of action learning set activity and outcomes in a recent international, hands-on study program at the Revans Centre for Action Learning and Research, University of Salford, UK.

Investigative Strategies

The researchers used multiple methods. Data from the original essays were reviewed for comparison with new data from interviews. (Member checks of the earlier data had been conducted several months ago.) For telephone and face-to-face surveys, respondents were provided "priming" questions similar but not identical to those used to guide the production of course-end essays a year earlier. In both cases, these were open-ended inquiries, asking at course end what was experienced during the progress of the action learning sets, and in the current study asking what influence the experience has had over a year's passage of time since class participation. Choices in framing and wording followed the patterns of questioning Brookfield recommends for participant evaluation of adult education. Recall of specific events was not the purpose of this follow-up inquiry. It was perceived to be more useful to pose questions that would help respondents "return to the scene" in a more general way, looking for those persistent learnings and "aha" moments when something changed for them that has outlasted the moment itself.

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The questions were constructed in collaboration with a colleague who conducts action learning classes in another university, and double-checked with doctoral students who were part of the original GSU classes but who have had additional formal action learning experiences during the intervening year. The purpose was to arrive at the strongest possible content validity before the questions were asked of the original action learners. Three of the original class members were excluded from the study because of their on-going formal study of action learning since the course. Their responses, if included, would have been influenced by the subsequent learning, and the researchers were clear about wanting to know what was retained, used, and valued as a result of the first experience only.

A graduate student who had not been involved in action learning in any way was selected to conduct the interviews. They were completed either on campus or off-site, by phone or face-to-face, at the convenience of the respondents. All are busy, working professionals whose schedules needed to be accommodated. The respondents were encouraged to record and/or orally report whatever came to mind about the original action learning experience, whether or not the theme or issue they raised had appeared in the earlier data. They were not confined to answering the questions in the interview protocol. The interviews were meant to present a new opportunity for reflection, and the degree of ease or difficulty which respondents might have in doing this was also expected to speak to the degree of persistence of the habit of reflection they were asked to develop during the coursework.

Electronic recording was not used, but the interviewer was asked to record what was said verbatim, in so far as possible. Respondents were aware that this was happening. They had already authorized use of the original essays for research purposes, and they willingly extended this permission to the new data generated. Six sets of interview data were obtained. Counting the exclusion of the three advanced action learners, nine out of 14 of the original essayists are accounted for. Four students, carrying over into the second class, repeated the essay assignment in the second quarter, yielding a total of 18 essays to be analyzed and coded. These second essays were generally a little more reflective, but were not sufficiently different to warrant a separate classification. Five essayists unaccounted for were on extended seasonal holidays, moved out-of-town, or otherwise unavailable in the given time frame. No person contacted was reluctant to give an interview.

Secondary Investigation: A Case Study. After completing the class, one student had carried her learning directly and immediately into application in her own organization, and had enlisted several others from the original class membership to help her work with an action learning set she convened. Her goal was to enable persons she supervised to prepare for large scale administrative changes in a private educational institution which was opening a satellite campus. She did not undertake additional formal learning about this kind of inquiry, nor did she make use of what might be called "experienced" action learning consultants, instead proceeding entirely on the basis of what knowledge and understanding had been gained in the original class. For this reason, she is included in the one-year-later group that had no additional formal training to use the techniques of action learning. The success of her pioneering efforts permits research follow-up that has an unusual amount of closure, and the story of how she applied what she learned seemed to merit special study.

This case-within-a-case section is co-authored by two HRD graduate students who never studied action learning. One of these had action learning thrust upon her as one of eight active set members at the private college, and so hers is an insider view of "one who went through it." Her research colleague is a volunteer who has considerable interest but no formal training in action learning or opportunity to participate in it. Together they interviewed set participants as well as the administrative supervisor, reflecting with them on the process and outcomes of the action learning response to crisis that the supervisor had introduced in her organization. They asked the supervisor the following questions specifically: 1) What did you hope to gain from [initiating] the action learning experience? 2) What differences did you notice in the participants while conducting your research [the trial set]? 3) What problems occurred and how did you handle them? 4) What constraints and organizational realities did the learning process reveal? and 5) Has your perception of action learning changed?

Themes Identified in Initial Coding of Essays

The 18 essays used for identifying the themes and patterns that emerged for students engaged in action learning in the university classroom were submitted by 14 graduate students, mixed at doctoral and masters levels (repeat essay assignment noted above). Because this was a start-up effort and not every student had a client organization to work with initially, some of the burden for providing experience with action learning was carried by an in-class project. It involved an intractable problem connected with making an HRD Center operational. Finally all members of the class had clients, except for one whose schedule could not be worked out. At the end of the Winter quarter, several students asked for an extended opportunity to work with these clients, and a second class was established for Spring quarter. Along with carry-over of four students from the first class, another four enrolled for the first time (class sizes: 10 and 8). These two groups are treated as one for research purposes, on the basis that much of their experience was common and that no large amount of new cognitive material was added in the second class.

Six of the themes emerged from the grouped data, managed with NUD-IST software, directly from the thought priming questions that guided the essay writing. Students were asked when they were most engaged, distanced, affirmed or uncertain, when they felt they did their best action learning work, etc. Other major themes emerged during the process of coding text units. There appeared to be 17 of these originally, but they later settled by frequency into a list of 16 with only one theme further subdivided. The themes, or domains of data, and their operational definitions are presented below:

Engaged - When I felt the most engaged, interested, involved, "meshed" in a positive way

Distanced - When I felt the most distanced or separated from others or from the subject under discussion

Affirmed - When I felt good about self, about others, and about the action learning set as a whole

Uncertain - When I was uncertain, confused, puzzled, self-doubting or reserving judgment

Best work - What I felt was my best work in action learning

Transformation - I was changed fundamentally, essentially in my thinking

Current insight - An "aha." Looking within myself, describes my current understanding

Learning gaps - (main theme with subcategories) What I initially saw (or now see) as missing from my knowledge of the subject, of self, or of people interactions

Learning gaps: interpersonal or intrapersonal - When I felt I didn't understand what was going on in the group or within myself

Learning gaps: cognitive - What I don't understand on an intellectual or subject matter level

Learning gaps: before event - What I wish I had known before I started the class

Learning gaps: after event - What I find I still need to know more about

Observation of others - Visual or insightful observations about others, about the set, or about the set mentor

Future reflection - Issues to be considered/thought about in the future

Credibility - When I worried about the issue of being credible to the client or to other set members while at the same time acknowledging ignorance of the problem and its solution

Enabling role - Ways that I helped the action learning process (e.g., modeling good questioning, encouraging set members or problem owners to help themselves or each other)

Key terms, metaphors - Images/ideas/phrases that stimulated, inspired, or illuminated my thinking, imagination, and/or confidence during the action learning process

Future action - What needs to be done as a result of action learning (i.e., to understand it better, do it better, facilitate it better, or otherwise accomplish related personal or professional growth).

Intensity - Extreme depth of energy or feeling; strenuous effort to do something

regarding others, self, or set (may be internally or externally evidenced)
Assumption/opinion - A categorical statement of belief as if it were fact (pontificating)

Each of the themes was spread, in direct quotations, on a matrix that indicated whether the nature of the comments were process-oriented, more concerned with organization issues, or more in the personal vein. Again, coders worked independently but reached a final consensus about this further sorting of the data. Two of the three coders had no connection to the course and thus were not biased by having been present for any of the events. The third was a graduate research assistant who had attended the first sessions and had helped to find and specify client problems for class members. For all three coders, this was a new kind of research, showing them ways to look at qualitative data that they had never attempted before.

What the Themes Imply for Adult Learning

Although students initially felt discomfited because they were not provided with specified, measurable behavioral outcomes in their course syllabus and wondered in their essays whether they could ever "get their arms around" the course content, their essays document a shift within two to three weeks of participating in the new kind of learning endeavor. They marked this movement with expressions that valued their new "freedom to learn"
and the encouragement to depend on their own resources to find out what they needed to know. There were readings and handouts and eventually texts imported from the UK, but as one student indicated, "It is hypocritical to study action learning without doing it." Other statements that appeared on the "learning gap-cognitive" matrix reflect a continuing puzzlement that kept the students curious, motivated, and occasionally frustrated. Intellectually, they wanted a clear definition of action learning; experientially, they were challenged and excited that they were going to have to find out for themselves what action learning meant to them and could mean to their organization. Illustrative comments can be helpful here:

> Action learning seems to be an open, honest communication between groups of people who have problems to solve, but I am not sure action learning is an entity at all --still puzzled after five books and pounds of articles.
>
> I am in formative stages and wondering about prescribed processes for action learning.
>
> I want personal accounts of experiences with action learning.
>
> I seek to match action learning with what I know so far...I am wondering about evidence that learning occurred as the set problem was solved.
>
> I am encouraged to investigate action learning further because I don't know what learning gaps are remaining or how to fill them.

The point these students are making as adult learners is that not having information all codified and outlined and not knowing exactly where their reading and processing is taking them is highly motivating. This turns on its head the notion that adults want to learn only what can be immediately translated into job skills. It also turns on it head the notion that HRD should primarily concern itself with training for improved performance. These are first implications of our observations from the data, and will need further treatment as set research goes forward.

Where the energy of the students seemed most to reside was in the personal growth side of learning. While an exhaustive accounting of these themes would be too lengthy for this article, it is clear from the data that students are most engaged in their learning when they are learning something about themselves *in relation to* working out problems and relationships. These are matters they know least about, and find most universally applicable as adults. They are most distanced when someone in the group is "pontificating," or acting the expert role as if there were no other knowledge to be had in the room except that of the pontificator. Assuming the naive learner stance does not seem natural in our society of adults, and yet, that is exactly what these students valued highly. Strikingly, it is precisely this genuine naivete, this recognition that we are not "know-it-alls" that made discussion safe and open, so that even the shyest

knew they were contributors and were rewarded for it. The paradox of this discovery against the backdrop of ever-increasing demand and dollars paid for "expertise" in organizations should be lost on no one in HRD, and goes far toward explaining the misuse and underutilization of the power in human resources organizations already have but mainly do not understand.

Since the original data analysis is referenced here primarily for comparison with newly collected data, only one other theme needs special mention. This is the theme of transformation. We have thought of this as a "change in the character or condition of a previous point of view," and have considered it a more satisfactory indicator of adult learning than is the traditional behaviorist definition of learning as "a change in behavior." It has been debated and is still debatable the extent to which world views and mental models influence what we do and think and feel, and how these influence our productivity, in turn. If the data from these fledgling action learning sets is borne out by subsequent research on action learning process and outcomes, then transformation is what adult individuals long for --but have grown not to expect -- in their learning. Transformations do not have to be earth-shattering, although the essayists do indicate that new realizations have been opened to them that were not accessible before. Two avenues of transformation were noted: concerning the personal, and concerning process. Few are willing to dare hope that their organizations are, or will be, transformative.

A major change for several participants was the development of comfort with the idea that "it is OK not to know." Paradoxically, this made one person "more confident than I have ever been." Another remarked that believing that one "knows" anything definitively "can even be dangerous/highly overrated." Another added, "It is a relief knowing that I don't have to be an expert...I may call on my intuition, common sense, and creative thinking...[This] makes it easier to deal with others in a group situation...now I do not feel intimidated." Again, "it built awareness for me, awareness of myself, awareness of the way I now think of myself and group dynamics."

Other illuminating comments about the transformative process show not only the deeply personal nature of action learning, but also the almost immediate applications that participants can see themselves making in their daily lives:

> I'm glad action learning has come into my life.
>
> Action learning permeates my waking and sleeping hours. I am different now because of the time spent discussing and experiencing action learning.
>
> To begin learning the skill of reflection was essential for me.
>
> [There were] several 'aha' moments for me ...not the ones that were shared and dissected [but] where something struck me in the middle of something else...did not occur during any formal sessions [but rather] at odd moments when I was supposed to be doing something else ...fascinating to experience these moments...realize just how much is going on subconsciously. [We] must deal more with human beings as whole people, rather than as inefficient machines.
>
> > When you question and explore, you are able to drop many of the value judgments that you normally place on individuals
> >
> > Incredible experience. Action learning is going to bring a new dimension to me both personally and professionally.
> >
> > I began to work through the sensitive issues and balance my self-criticism.
> >
> > It has not been just another learning theory added to my knowledge. I view it more as a life philosophy that I could use in all areas of my life --helped me realize it is OK just to question and reflect.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that these are expressions from graduate students who have heavy investment in acquiring knowledge, and who work hard to develop their expertise. It is also important to note that personal transformations do not stand in the way of impressive bottom line results. They may even facilitate these. One student reports that his client organization is anticipating saving over a million dollars annually for the corporation as a result of his action learning set work with them. (Report forthcoming.)

Interview Data, One Year Later

Those original class members who have not had further connection to action learning are still finding it "hard to explain what it is." One respondent suggests that this is because "Other forms focus on specific learning tasks --regurgitation paradigms. It [action learning] is the exact opposite of memorization and regurgitation." A selection of other memorable comments shows that participants still place a high value on the experience and provides at least broad verification of transformational themes:

> [At first I thought it was] a typical consulting experience It was not until later after I got started in my own [client] set that I realized the contrast. I had always been the consultant "expert" and in action learning I was in an environment where I was not the expert. I began to realize how unimportant expertise is relative to new problems. I would like to be involved in more action learning projects...[I] have always been known as an "out of the box" guy. Action learning has given me some validation.
>
> Action learning...is the only learning method capable of producing quantum leaps. It is like doing a literature search on a topic and then adding your own little bit of additional information [traditional learning] vs. the discovery of germs. Action learning is the vehicle for helping us realize things we can't see.
>
> Action learning is a filter through which you see things. It permeates a lot of things you look at...There is a universality about it; it crosses cultural boundaries. Very useful! The higher up you go in life, the more of your day is spent problem solving. It is applicable to any problem solving situation, both personal and professional. Do we both have the same idea of the problem? What is standing in the way of solving it?
>
> The biggest impact is that I see it in everything I do --[It is] a great theoretical basis for a PhD program.
>
> Professionally, you are expected to be an expert, and [in my organization] I am trying to introduce the idea that non experts are better at coming up with solutions. Personally I have always tried to find a quick fix. Now I look at the framework and what is the definition of a solution and how to go about getting it.
>
> I have used action learning techniques with my wife. Personally I am more open to ideas and future solutions that previously I would not have considered. I have also done more journaling, and am asking questions in my journal that I don't feel obligated to answer.
>
> How I look at things and what I look at are different in action learning. And what you aim to gain is different. It offers an openness to allow a number of different possibilities to happen. Going in not knowing what you will learn is different than set objectives that we usually have in a training environment.
>
> I have been unable to use action learning in any practical application at work [but] professionally I am always looking for a place to use it. I have come close in my National Guard work but they, too, are caught up in putting out fires and getting the next thing done. [There is] no time to flush out issues, no critical mass that understands... The problem is everyone is looking for a quick answer... I think you could seed it through the

> organization to create a critical mass. I am disappointed in my organization's approach to a learning organization. People don't want to look at things a different way.
>
> It provides the opportunity to look at things in a fresh light --not easy to do. We have our own schema. Action learning takes you out of that paradigm. It forces you out and gives you a fresh way.

An interesting side comment from the interviewer highlights the fact that action learning can be having transformative effects that even the action learners discount or are unaware of. A respondent who was most despairing of introducing action learning in his organization had begun to use action learning principles in dialogue with his wife (the second male student who reported this). He quotes himself as saying, "Let's stop and see if we can ask a fresh question." The interviewer notes that he does find this helps to get to the issue, and find fresh questions that can keep the interaction more dynamic. The interviewer's behavioral observation was that the respondent seemed "surprised and pleased he had done this."

These comments are all from original set members who -- although they retain their belief in the power of action learning to help people and organizations learn, change, and grow -- would not describe themselves at this time as "doing" action learning in their organizations. So, while personal themes and effects of the class experience are verified as carrying over into their personal lives, they are not seeing great gains in the work place. The story of the fifth respondent is different, and her comments are reserved for inclusion in the case study that describes how she left the class and "just went out and did it" at considerable risk to herself professionally. She did so under conditions of organization crisis and feeling the weight of responsibility to tackle unknowns in the problem situation.

Case Study: Leading Administrative Change

In August, soon after class had been completed, the novice leader of action learning at the private academic institution began with a presentation to the management committee and the president. The issue was an on-going problem with enrollment processing, involving the work of three departments. It was agreed that the president would be the client; the sponsors would be the management committee who would designate individuals from their respective areas that they felt would take ownership of the problem and who would benefit most from "fixing" the problem. A one-hour initial meeting was set for September, with monthly meetings thereafter. The formal project actually lasted only eight weeks, and at the end of that time, the group knew it could "show evidence of organizational change as the result of action learning." The authors who revisited this intervention and reported the results in case study form have written the synopsis that follows.

Action learning describes a developmental approach used in a group setting to assist organizations with accomplishing objectives. We discovered that action learning is not intended to fully resolve organizational problems. Rather, the *experience* is designed to confront learners with the constraints of organizational realities, often leading to the discovery of alternative and creative means of accomplishing objectives. The set members [8 in all, from the registrar's office, student services, and academics] were presented with the challenge of creating greater efficiency in the new student enrollment process.

The areas to be examined for efficiency were proof of graduation, transcript evaluation, application processing, file maintenance, and resume student processing. Once developed, the new enrollment procedures would be used to manage the rise in student enrollment that would occur with the opening of the new satellite campus. Eventually it was hoped that the satellite campus would use this process for managing new student enrollment.

From the outset, the learning set convener felt she had a basic understanding and limited experience with regard to action learning. As time progressed, she began to see action learning as more of an experience than a definition. During the first meeting, the facilitator noticed that some of the participants seemed distant and uninvolved in the learning process. By the third meeting, however, things changed. Participants became more comfortable with one another and displayed an eagerness to express

ideas. Group members also began to examine the enrollment process stage by stage. Around the same time, the "ah-ha" factor (that moment of clarity when both the problem and the potential solutions become evident to all) became a very important part of the process when examining the responsibilities of each department in the enrollment process. Questions were raised that forced everyone to rethink the responsibilities of each department...and led to a shifting of responsibilities and work load. As weeks passed, the action learning process paved the way for change.

As the process continued, the potential roadblocks became evident. The management staff did not always support the process, which affected group member attendance. Management did not allow employees to utilize their ideas. New problems arose out of the transferring of responsibilities. The administrative staff was reluctant to change. The absence of some group members detracted from the questioning and may have limited the overall learning process. If the facilitator had it to do over again, more time would be spent initially in securing full management buy-in. In retrospect also, the make-up of the action learning set could have been more diverse.

What was accomplished was nevertheless no small achievement. Action learning never stopped at this college even after the group ended their meetings. Short term changes included these steps: 1) Processing of student applications and administration of files was combined in one streamlined area. 2) New positions were created. 3) Transcript evaluation was shifted to another department for greater efficiency. Changes that were oriented toward meeting long-term objectives were: 1) The newly established enrollment procedures set standard for the satellite campus. 2) Positions, as well as employee qualifications, were upgraded. 3) Cross-training became a part of every employee's accountabilities at the satellite campus.

This was intended and carried out as a limited intervention, confined to one area of college operations. It is perceived as an example of what action learning can do in a very short period of time when there is even a grass-roots commitment to it. The mental boundaries the set struggled with in the beginning were overcome through the establishment of trust and open discussion. Those once timid, were now eager to seek advice of co-workers. The bonds of friendship and respect that were forged though this process were seen as yet another benefit.

Conclusions

"Time and time again, we were reminded of the fact that action learning is an ongoing, ever changing process," report the case study examiners. As all three authors have discussed the retrospective look that this multi-sided
follow-up study has provided, we find ourselves in agreement that reflecting on what happened, or did not happen, and how we interpret those events, are also highly significant adult learning processes. What seems especially instructive about the case study is its illustration of the fact that action learning is immediately applicable, doesn't take a guru to initiate, and is highly satisfying because of high engagement, high learning, and the high potential pay-offs that are associated with its high risks.

There are more telling comments from the masters student who took her courage and her belief in action learning into her own workplace, after five brief but intensive weeks in an adult action learning class. She is thoroughly convinced that "Action learning opens up doors and allows tacit knowledge to spring forth from people. Fresh questions bring out ideas not exposed before... Professionally, it has brought education into the loop of problem solving. The focus is on learning, not just resolving. I have integrated it into my teams. It is an evolutionary process of growth and development. I am using it on an an-going basis." She has also stated that "there may be no such thing as an 'expert' in action learning," because every group is different and "you can only understand and learn the process by doing it." However, she feels that "feedback from knowledgeable individuals who have experienced the process is mandatory." The knowledgeable individuals, it should be noted, were other members of the same class she used as a springboard for her bold organizational intervention.

The lessons for adult educators and HRD professionals in this verification study are simple: Adults take great joy and pride in taking charge of their own learning, once they are freed and expected to

do so and are provided with some insights and techniques for undertaking this. The less they are led down a structured path to "knowledge," the more they feel they are fully capable and voluntarily engaged in the learning enterprise. What they have been intellectually, psychologically, and socially engaged in learning tends to "stick" and be called into use. The value of an externally conducted "gap analysis" to identify their own learning shortcomings becomes questionable, when the evidence of what they do not know and cannot do is accessible to them much more personally and immediately in the fully participatory and highly charged environment of action learning.

Even when we are confronted with overwhelming evidence that these things are true, as those of us who work with action learning are repeatedly confronted, there are not a lot of easy answers as to how we can best integrate the inquiry-plus-action process highly structured, linearly and hierarchically designed academic environments. It is refreshing to see, however, that some brave "non-experts" just roll up their sleeves and go out and do it.

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Commitment of Action Learners in an Unfamiliar Setting to Clients, Other Set Members, and the AL Process Itself

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Five internationally and otherwise diverse action learning sets worked with manager-clients of the South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust in the UK, to help resolve serious dilemmas posed by merger, reorganization of services, and facility closing. Set members were largely unknown to each other and unfamiliar with hospital work and cultures. They addressed the clients' needs continuously over a period of two weeks. Grouped data generated from text units of 23 essays written by set members demonstrate that they did not lose sight of their responsibility to the client even when the challenges of their own group process and personal learning were most intense.

Proponents of the use of small group processes for organization learning, problem-solving, and decision-making have choices to make about what data to collect to demonstrate direct connections with positive organizational change. Commonly, skeptical clients will express concerns like these: 1) Conceding that learning interpersonal skills is valuable to employees, can we be assured that real tasks are accomplished in the midst of all this concentration on processing? Isn't there a tendency to put personal issues ahead of the client's needs and the desired organizational outcomes? 2) How much involvement ought management to have in the process work? 3) Is the time spent justified by superior results? 4) When do participants stop talking and get on with whatever it is that they are talking about doing?

For those considering action learning initiatives, there are other natural concerns: Is this "new idea" worth a try in our organization? What does anyone really learn that cannot be learned more efficiently by other means? Will this help us develop a learning organization? Particularly in the case of action learning, scholars need to look for process data that will help to answer these questions, for in such data there are real success stories that may tend to be obscured by more customary end-point measures. Even the preliminary findings presented and interpreted here suggest that solid evidence of the value of action learning can be provided to prospective clients, once an action learning process data base of sufficient depth and variety has been established and explicated. We find that in the Salford case we are studying, action learning does not dilute organization learning or work, but instead enhances both.

Using the Data from the NHS Trust Project

Most action learning sets do tend to have difficulty maintaining a deliberate balance between accomplishment of tasks and investment in personal learning, for they are always in the midst of confronting real problems in real time. The problem nexus and the uncertainties it holds loom very large in everyone's mind. Simultaneously, however, they are in the midst of learning how to solve problems in the future without always having to return to ground zero in their understanding and their personal and group momentum. The gaining of new insights--*about how to gain new insights continuously* --is central to this effort. The difficulty of striking an authentic balance is legendary among participants who use the Revans action learning model, and the action learners in the hospital trust project, working out of the Revans Centre for Action Learning and Research at the University of Salford in the UK, were no exception.

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Those unfamiliar with the model will want to know a few specifics. Revans states explicitly that, for new learning to occur at anywhere near the rate of organizational and world change, learning from dialogue with one another will need to be seriously attended to. Learning can then be defined as a function of continuously combining what is already known from our collective accumulation of formal, programmed knowledge (P) with the posing of assumption-testing, insight-generating questions (Q). Revans has used L= P + Q as shorthand for this combination/recombination of elements that leads to learning. What happens when people get together in action learning sets to learn and problem-solve lacks the predictability many social scientists value , but on the other hand, there do appear to be patterns common to the sets as they evolve. It is one such pattern that this study seeks to illuminate.

The Honey-Mumford Learning Style Questionnaire used to identify preferred styles of the set members also was used to place them in sets that would have all styles represented. The likelihood that a set would turn out to be composed entirely of activists, or would be all reflectors, all pragmatists, or all theorists was therefore nil. While it was predictable that some set members on the basis of learning styles would be uncomfortable if a task orientation did not predominate and others would be uncomfortable if it did, that is not specifically what we wanted to know about at this particular point in our research. As we coded data from the essays 23 participants wrote at the end of the experience about how they perceived the action learning process, we found a category of statements that repeated over and over, theme and variations. What these highlighted was that participants felt a deep sense of responsibility for what they were doing.

We wanted to know how that pattern played out when NUD-IST software generated group data. To what or to whom did the set members feel most responsible, and what did they do about it? They were all many hundreds of miles from home and they were not accountable for working as paid consultants. Why, in a totally unfamiliar setting, working with clients and set members they had never seen before and might never see again, was their commitment so strong? It seemed important to find out, and perhaps to add another set of insights to the building of theory about action learning processes and outcomes.

The investigative approach is case study, calling upon mixed methods (Stake, 1994; Willis, 1998) for illumination of the phenomena of action learning as perceived and reflected upon by those who were engaged in the process. The recording of critical incidents is vital. Since the data is all derived from personal essays about the lived experience, the data also represent a kind of "life writing" by individuals (Smith, 1994) -- an autobiographical perspective on events in which they were involved that took them out of familiar contexts (as they say, out of their "comfort zone") during an intensive two-week period in their lives. Many describe those two weeks as unlike any they have previously experienced. Our own observations and involvement "on call" as set mentors during the same time frame provide the only data beyond the essays. No formal follow-up interviewing has been done. As in all textual analysis, the analytical task is to trace the material evidence in the personal documents and to identify how it fits within "a hermeneutical whole." (Hodder, 1994).

Types of Commitment

Three persons involved in the coding process found independently but unanimously that set members expressed strong feelings of responsibility 1) to the client, 2) to other members of their set, 3) to preservation of the integrity of the action learning process as they understood it, and occasionally 4) to the back-home professions with which they identified and hoped to share information upon their return (e.g., HRD, adult education, management). Data was sorted into each of the four sub-headings as well as collected in the major domain called "responsibility." These constitute the reports on which findings and interpretations are based. Constant comparison helped to find patterns within the data that may have theoretical significance.

There were several advance clues related to the personal and group commitment factors. Over the course of the two week summer program when the project was underway, high anxiety was expressed over the final presentations that were to be made to the hospital managers. Many set members were thoroughly convinced that there was insufficient time to produce anything of value for their clients. Still, they would

have to try. Thus, there was an overriding sense of responsibility keyed to the knowledge that somehow, each set would have to "get the job done." What "the job" was seemed far from clear. Some overtly expressed the need to be told how to do it, or at least to be told what the final product should look like -- a condition inconsistent with real, at-risk problem solving. As set mentors, we thought we saw task performance anxiety and personal fear of failure in this, as well as a preference for structure and linear procedures. But we were also beginning to see something else: a growing sense of participant identification with the clients and their dilemmas. Tension stretched between the struggle to meet the clients' needs and the struggle in learners' respective sets to figure out what to do with each other and their feelings toward each other as they worked long hours together. Then there was the added stress of doing everything that had to be done in a two-week time frame. For some, there was perhaps an added feeling that if they did not perform well, they would be letting their assigned and/or roving mentors down, not "measuring up" to what we hoped for them.

This learning experience was never intended to be a simulation -- or "just another class project" -- and if any participants had thought it would be, they were quickly disabused of the notion. Thus, the first explanation we had for the rapid commitment to task achievement was the participants' headlong encounter with real problems that needed to be solved. That is, of course, a distinguishing feature of action learning and its motivation impact was anticipated. It did not fully prepare us for the depth of commitment to persons and to action learning itself that we later found expressed in the data. This leads us to speculate that task commitment and commitment to the client are not quite the same thing. While the first may be characteristic of early phases of action learning (engendered by the participants' ethical and achievement motives to perform) , if commitment does not shift from task toward the person who will use task outcomes (the client; the problem owner), action learning may not reach its best potential. High task orientation may even stand in the way of discovering that the problem as originally stated is not the root problem that concerns the client, or it may stand in the way of client understanding and acceptance of new information or willingness to act upon it.

Expressions of commitment to the client or to other set members could be expected to vary in kind and intensity from person to person, and they did. We decided to look at the gender influence, if any, to see whether the commitment-to-client responses in particular were of the "caring" or nurturing type, and whether such expressions came equally as often from women and men. While similar questions arose concerning the nature and extent of commitment set members expressed toward each other, space prevents reporting those results of the more extended investigation here.

Finally, we were intrigued by what appeared to be a high level of involvement in making the action learning process work the way Reg Revans, who was a roving set mentor, envisioned it. There were many notations in the essays of ways in which action learning is distinct from other kinds of group experiences the participants know about or have personally experienced. For the most part, the distinguishing features of action learning were pulled from and referenced to the experience itself rather than from an academic understanding of the process.

The following discussion is confined largely to reporting and interpreting the patterns and meanings associated with commitment to clients. Commitment to other set members, to the process of action learning, and to the home professions are referenced only as necessary to provide context for understanding the development of client commitment. Each of the four dimensions of what we have come to call the action learning " responsibility series" is a story in itself, with much more to be told in subsequent analyses.

Stages of Commitment

Action learners were able very early in the set work to identify with the knotty, palpable dilemmas faced by the clients. This appears to be a distinct, "grappling with the issues" phase-- ripe for misuse of an activist style, "inquisitional" attempts to fact-find, and paternalistic "take over" of the burdens of the client. It was not a comforting time for set members, who could not initially see their way past the paradox of "having" a problem and knowing next to nothing about it. Frustrated , one participant suspected at first

that the client system was unwilling to share pertinent information and could even be engaged in "problem cover-up." This is one potent illustration of the low tolerance task-driven individuals have for low-clarity/high ambiguity assignments, and illustrates one of the highest hurdles the action learning process must clear if it is to be successful. Set members were confronted with the realization that they simply did not know enough to start with the customary trouble-shooting techniques, a realization that may even be an indicator that true action learning has begun (Dilworth, 1997).

Shortly thereafter, empathy for the client-as-person began to emerge. Set members more readily accepted their own knowledge gaps, became better listeners, and essays signaled a distinct shift in the nature of the client and set relationship. Clients were suddenly observed to be knowledgeable, courageous, and truly dedicated to their work, albeit faced with enormous and unprecedented challenges. At this stage, set members still tended to see the problem solution in terms of their own personal and set performance responsibility.

During a third stage (and with varying degrees of success), set members loosened their unintentional control over problem definition and solution, understanding finally that these were prerogatives of the clients. When set members gave up being " the problem owners," they reported finding themselves remarkably free to provide a qualitatively and quantitatively different kind of help. One essayist described the change in this way:

> We slid into the ownership trap on several occasions. It's a seemingly natural progression that once a problem has been identified, it must be "fixed." We had to remind ourselves that we did not have ownership of the problem. Stating this was liberating to the group, because it enabled us to return to exploring the disconnects and questions surrounding them. [Two set members] helped to remind us that even if the answers were good to us, they might not be to the ones concerned. It needed to be their answers.

Suggestions could not profitably be posed as solutions, and questions could not be asked in a style that implied that the questioner already had "the answer." Even during the final presentations made to the client-managers, one participant worried that what was being presented could too easily be construed as accusatory, faulting managers for what they had not yet done, and potentially raising defensiveness and resistance to undertaking new strategies. As the sets evolved, members were increasingly sensitized to the effects their thoughts and actions could have on others, and reflection -before-the-act became a necessity. Even those most wedded to the belief that using their personal expertise was critical to the set enterprise began to soften their insistence that their points of view should carry the day. Potential effects on clients seemed to be uppermost in everyone's mind.

At the same time, individual task performance anxiety was never completely overcome. In one set, which undertook 22 interviews of non-clinical personnel, a researcher expertise was offered as a way of overcoming the fear of ending the two-week stay without a "product" to offer the client. In other sets, a conscious effort was made to serve as non-expert "sounding boards" and parapersonal extensions for enabling and encouraging the client manager to share his/her own reasoning, reflecting, and exploration of things that might be done. As the case has ultimately unfolded, both kinds of approaches seem to have served the clients well.

Illustrations and Findings

The question of whether gender differences in commitment to client could be shown is easily settled. No such differences have appeared in the data; even in the second stage of commitment when "feminine" relationship empathy might have surfaced. It may be that participants selected the action learning experience partly because they were already predisposed toward caring, accomplishing change, and service providing in organizations. Not all were human resources professionals, however.

Broad Indicators of Commitment. Evidence of commitment to the client ranged all the way from copious note-taking during early hospital administration and manager-provided orientation sessions to end-of-project expressions of the desire to stay in touch. The first is indicative, once again, of the powerful urge to do the best job possible on the basis of as complete information as might be acquired. The latter shows the movement toward commitment to the client as person and colleague. A capsule illustration is the comment: "By the end of the program, I found [client's name] to be very warm and friendly. I truly wish that we could continue our support of her. I do plan to write to her and send her a copy of our group photo." Interpersonal warmth and a general sense of accomplishment was reciprocal. There is little doubt that this was a turning point experience for hospital personnel also, for the use of action learning sets has been expanded to other hospitals within the NHS. The interaction with people from outside their own organization and frame of reference left Manchester hospital managers with " some wonderful tools to use to make the [change] process move smoother," as one reported to the set assigned to work her problem. "We had grown very close as a set," and were then able to offer a number of suggestions without giving advice, a member of that set agrees. In this particular set the client-manager had been successfully encouraged to become a trusted and participating member, present for some of the crucial set deliberations, fully apprised of set progress throughout the duration of the project, and even participating in the final presentation of set findings to hospital management. The value of manager participation in set work was not lost on the hospital administration; in retrospect they believed they should have made the client-managers' time available for set participation throughout the entire project instead of leaving the time commitment negotiable set by set.

Disoriented at first by the totality of their unfamiliarity with the setting, set members came later to appreciate ways in which the client organization made extraordinary commitments of it own to accommodate the set activity. One significant piece of this was up-close exposure to the critical work of the hospitals, complete with tours of the surgeries while heart and thoracic operations were in progress, intensive care, and outpatient clinics. Another sign of trust and commitment was the approval for and scheduling of the 22 interviews of hospital staff personnel. Such on-site involvement --far more personally experienced than any encounters in hospital meeting rooms --went a long way toward engaging the action learners in the real problems with which they were to wrestle. It was this access to the hospital that enabled one action learning set to discover that "the assigned problem was not the true area that needed attention." While this is a characteristic discovery in problem-finding phases of any investigation, in action learning the need for a change in focus is revealed in the process of group inquiry and not by an importation of outsider expertise. As one essayist described this effect, "Managers and consultants are used to dealing in black and white, but action learning requires imagery in gray. There is reality behind unfamiliar places and unfamiliar problems." "Asking and answering fresh questions induces people to challenge assumptions," another added, although challenging assumptions can also pose considerable threat to an organization which thinks it knows what problems it has. Perceptions of and admiration for the courage with which managers were facing their problems changed dramatically, effacing earlier cynicism about how serious the two NHS facilities were about making change.

Specific Expressions of Commitment to Client. The nature of these specific expressions has already been indicated in discussion of the three stages of commitment. The growth of the commitment is best illustrated in the set members' own words, however. The intensity of confusion in the first stage is represented by the following comments, gleaned from across the 23 member essays:

> We feared that the client representatives would come to the final presentation expecting six sets, six problems, and six solutions.
>
> One the third day the sets got together for the first time. We took a look at all the information that the hospitals had thrust upon us. We began to ask ourselves several questions...such as, why did they give us all this paperwork? What did they think we could do with all this information within a two-week limit? Did they expect us to respond as experts? We reminded ourselves that we were not there to solve the problem of the merger, but to lay the ground work for the managers to continue working together long after we returned home. We decided to invite [our client] to an informal meeting to address our questions... We asked her the previous questions and added, what is it she

would like to get out of our learning experience? We needed to know if we were to work on the stated problem... We were pleased to find out all she wanted from us was to be a sounding board for her and she didn't want another expert report. She wanted to bounce her ideas off of us and see if she had the right idea about the action learning process... It saved us a lot of time because we didn't have to guess what she wanted from us...She had to have her business plan ready before the first of the year.

We had many ideas about how we thought the outcome should be...We made guesses and assumptions and then decided to call in an expert on the subject. We asked [a British set mentor] to allow us to question him about the norms for women managers in his society...We took what he stated and when we met with [our client] again we got her feelings about where she stood on this issue. This gave us a clearer view of our limitations in reaching a desired outcome.

Our first time out with our client was not productive or very cohesive. We regrouped after that fiasco and went through a self-assessment.

All the members asked: What are we supposed to do? Is the expectation to solve our assigned problem? And is the problem truly the stated problem?

We had a brief meeting with our client to discuss the scope of the problem. We then had subsequent meetings with her and her staff to talk about their experiences and feelings in regard to the privatization. (This led to more extensive, one-on-one interviewing.) Our third day was in chaos...Some wanted to emphasize the process of action learning while some wanted a list of questions to give to our client on the day of our presentation.

The problem focus as it was presented to us was laden with systemic disconnects. We decided to break it down to foundational, relational segments, and asked questions relating to those disconnects. What a long winding road to this rather basic discovery! We were fraught with analyzing the details presented to us.

While some of the foregoing statements foreshadow a change toward the second stage of commitment, as set members began to empathize with their clients and respect the fact that they were facing challenges of major proportions, the next series of quotations exemplify this second phase more readily. They show the shifting of the concern of the set from "What shall we do and how shall we begin?" toward understanding the need for confidentiality and trying to see the problem arena from the client's perspective.

The set perceived that the client contact was wary of our role. Initially, she directly answered our questions but never elaborated; nor did she volunteer any information. We knew that building trust was a major concern and that she had reason to be cautious with her information.
Over time, she became somewhat more at ease and after providing her with a trial run of our final presentation, she seemed relieved and relaxed. Our intentions were to protect her at all costs. We told her this repeatedly but it took proof to convince her.

There was a concern that we could be placing [our client] in job jeopardy and considerable effort was expended in ensuring the presentation was factual and data-based. Additionally, [the client] was the only Trust person provided a written copy of the presentation material.

The most common obstacle to reflection was the urge to get on task --to solve the client's problem. The closer we got to the end of the two weeks, the more of an effort it was to engage in reflection. Simultaneously, of course, was the increased concern about what we were to supposed to present to the client on the last day.

> Despite our commitment to following action learning guidelines, our set and others feared that the client would be expecting something of benefit to show for our time involvement. It was the realization that the Revans learning cycle was never completed and therefore we could not deliver a truly beneficial nugget, that seemed to redirect the group from trying to develop a "package" for the final presentation. Instead, we focused on a presentation of our experience with the action learning process with the idea of introducing the Trust hospitals to the process and challenging them to continue what we had begun at Salford.
>
> What was profound was the enormous amount of inquiry and insight that this process of sharing gave to the manager, his assistant, and the set members. By the end of the morning, the manager and his assistant were seeing the problem quite differently. Even more profound was the fact that the manager and his assistant came up with their own solutions.
>
> [Our set] succeeded in developing a presentation which permitted the hospital managers to view their problems from different perspectives. It asked a vital question for their managers to consider at all times, which was: "What is not negotiable, and why ?"

The last quotations shade over into the third stage, in which set members relinquished their ownership of the problem to the client whose responsibility it becomes to address it in forward action. While the action learning cycle requires that something be done with findings of the inquiry, the burden for action is always on the problem owner and others who care about and can do something about the problem. When the unfamiliar/unfamiliar quadrant of Revans' matrix for set formation is utilized, the implementation action devolves upon those who work in the organization under study. The visitors certainly became engaged in and concerned for helping to find problem solutions and wanted to do more. Despite their time limitations there was widespread satisfaction with what they had accomplished. There was also widespread conviction that the client-managers considered themselves much farther along in their thinking, after the two weeks of inquiry. When one client was asked to comment on the value of action learning at the end of one set meeting, he said, "I find the process of having to explain things to ignorant and interested people very stimulating. It makes you articulate the problem and explore it more deeply. We make so many assumptions, and we're far too busy to do this at work.."

Commitment as an Overall Theme in Action Learning

A highly significant contribution the participants felt they made was to model the action learning process with sufficient integrity so as to present it in a favorable light to the client organization. "One thing which became increasingly evident at Salford was that not only did the process develop, we developed as users of the process. The client also developed at least the exposure to a new problem solving method and at most the foundation and impetus for implementing action learning in its own environment," asserted one set member.

Several spoke of the inequalities of expertise among set members, and the personal credibility they felt was at stake when some exercised their expertise in dominant ways. It is instructive to note that the one set member in the entire group who probably came closest to being a hospital expert, a CEO of a hospital from Australia, did not pose solutions but did explain socialized medicine when asked. Commenting on this, a set member saw this behavior as evidence of the outsider-CEO's commitment to the Manchester hospital clients, who would not be well served by any ready-made solutions. It was also viewed as a delicately balanced commitment to other set members and to the within-set process of action learning.

Even from the small sampling of statements provided , it should be obvious that without making commitments to fellow set members and to the integrity of the action learning process, less than optimal results would be achieved in action learning. It may be particularly crucial in the unfamiliar/unfamiliar type, where pre-conceptions about problems and setting --and in this case, participants -- would seem

particularly hazardous. . In every instance, the accomplishing of the work for the client was played against the backdrop of interpersonal dynamics in the sets, as members learned about each other, how they thought, and what values they operated from. In at least one instance, commitment to the client took temporal precedence over the resolution of strong feelings generated in exchanges between two set members. This caused a delay in interpersonal processing that violated the norms the group had established for itself to be open, honest, and immediate in confronting such issues. The norm was voluntarily suppressed by the persons involved so that work could be completed on the final presentation in time for client review. The incident can surely be viewed as both a commitment to client and to the process of action learning, for decisions were made openly and with input of the adversaries.

Another excerpt from an essay strikes a appropriate note for concluding this discussion: "The Salford experience and the work with the South Manchester Trust Hospitals made it very evident that organizational growth and learning could result from continued action leaning activities." This seems a perfect expression of the hope for change that grows when there is a comprehensive commitment to the simple-- and workable-- ideals of action learning.

The conclusions we draw are entirely based on the reflections of those who wrote at considerable length about what they pursued, what they accomplished, and how they felt about it. New insights about how to use action learning as an organization, group, and individual development strategy are certainly of interest to others working in the action technology mode of HRD practice, as well as to those who have instructional responsibilities and who seek to employ action technologies in HRD teaching. The interface action learners have with clients (the "problem owners") is a crucial element of the action learning framework. It may be particularly important to understand how client outcomes and participant learning may be impacted by action learners who are "naive" and not familiar with the organizational setting or the clients with whom they work.

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Cognitive Frame Phases In An Action Reflection Learning™ Program

ARL™INQUIRY[1]

Much has been written about group or team phase development, but little exists about how an individual's perspectives must change as the individual becomes a team member and as the group or team progresses through the various phases of development. This paper proposes a model of this individual perspective development as observed in several action learning programs.

Much attention has been given to group or team phase development, such as Tuckman's (1965) "Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing" model. For practitioners, attention has also been focused on group leadership and facilitation techniques Schein, 1988; Schwarz, 1994). Research on individual responses to group expectations has focused on ways in which individuals are overpowered by the group, as, for example, Janis's (1972) discussion of group think, and Milgram's (1974) classical research on compliance. Little attention has been given, however, to the transformation of perspective, and its relationship to learning, that needs to occur as someone goes from being an individual in a nominal team to being a team member in a fully functioning team. We need to know more about the transformations that occur as team members work and learn together, the progression of these transformations, and behaviors characteristic and indicative of them. This paper adopts an over-all theoretical assumption that purposeful individual behavior arises from, and conforms to, an actor's cognitive frame. That is, behavior is dependent upon one's definition of the situation, and the role(s) one adopts to construct behavior in that situation.

This paper asks the question, "How do participants in an action learning program alter their conceptual framework to become team members of a fully functioning team, engaged in both task and learning?"

One view of team learning which has found evidence of progression through various stages describes four modes of team learning- Fragmented, Pooled, Synergistic, and Continuous (Kasl, Marsick, & Dechant, 1997).

> "In the Fragmented mode, individuals learn separately, but the group does not learn as a holistic system. ...In the Pooled mode, individuals begin to share information and perspectives in the interest of group efficiency and effectiveness. ...In the Synergistic mode, members create knowledge mutually. ...Our concept of the Continuous mode describes a team in which synergistic learning becomes habitual (pp. 230,231).

While this model of team learning phase progression describes transitions from individualistic to continuous learning, it focuses on what teams do, and not how team members frame things differently as they become a functioning team. Observations of teams in action learning programs suggest that learning is a necessary part of team formation and maturation, and that such learning involves a phase progression of cognitive frames for the individuals involved.

Methodology

This study derives from four Action Reflection Learning ™ (ARL™)[2] programs including: (1) a major food manufacturing organization; (2) an automotive manufacturing organization; (3) a

[1] ARL™ INQUIRY is a research group affiliated with Leadership in International Management Ltd. Contributors to this paper are: Glenn Nilson, Lyle Yorks, Judy O'Neil, Sharon Lamm.

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major utilities organization; and, (4) current research being conducted in a financial institution. Research conducted at the major food and financial companies have included a field observation component conducted by ARL™ Inquiry, a research consortium studying action learning, organizational learning, and the learning organization. This paper also draws data collected on an ongoing action learning program in a large utility company. This program is shorter in duration than the programs which have included an ARL™ Inquiry researcher—there is an orientation day followed by three 2-day sessions over a 6 week period. Data from the program is being collected through evaluations methods including debriefing of the learning coaches and critical incident interviews with participants who have completed the program. The automotive manufacturing study drew data from questionnaires and interviews conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation.

Findings: What Cognitive Phases Have Been Observed?

Phase One - Self-Focused Individualism As ARL™ programs begin, it has been observed that participants enter the situation with expectations and cognitive frames derived from previous experiences and their interpretations of the events to happen based on those experiences. However, ARL™ programs do not generally fit with participants'entering frames, so there is a tension between their attempts to impose existing frames onto the situation encountered, and the inadequacy of those frames to serve as bases for behavior.

As participants enter the program, they do so as individual business leaders with interests focused on their businesses and their own careers. Being on a team is likely to be seen as similar to being an individual in competition with other individuals.

Within their teams, members often compete with each other to define how their team will operate, attempt to take charge, impose familiar structures, and engage in familiar roles. Participants may exhibit this by attempting to take charge of the meeting, or by suggesting a structure for the team to begin its operations. Since action learning contains real project work as a core element of a program, participants often quickly turn to attempts at task work, even task solution, as they are still encountering initial stages of group formation. Not surprisingly, they generally approach their tasks with the same frames as they engaged their teams- as competing individuals attempting to solve problems by using familiar perspectives.

Organization	Behavioral Examples
Major Food Organization	Two ranking members of a group in effect competed for leadership—one with the pen and the other standing at the other end of the room as they talked. One of the two said during a stop/reflect, "I am uncomfortable...you are leading, but not marshalling us in a direction," prompting another member of the group to say, "I think he's doing what you want to do!"
Automotive Manufacturing Organization	"I would say when I first showed up (to the program), my whole approach to it was to try to gain some kind of political advantage. People know that you're here, they know that you're in something that is considered elite...get good marks so that any feedback that comes back will be positive. You just use it as a political steppingstone to enhance your own career and your upward mobility."
Major Utilities Organization	Members of one team represented had worked together before. Their first day's interaction was heavily disrupted by interruptions, sniping and competition for air time. As they worked together over the two days they discovered that they could work together more smoothly and with much less interpersonal conflict by

	establishing and maintaining a set of ground rules for conducting the team's business and for interaction within the team. By the end of the two days, they had substantially reduced the tendency to interrupt, they responded to statements others were making and they appeared to be working well together.
Financial Institution	"In the beginning I was quite skeptical. In the past there have been numerous courses. None resulted in any change" "I'm trying to evaluate against my old world and the project ahead..." "We should just treat the problem as our business, and from that determine the things that are needed to set that business up."

Phase Two – Team Focused Individualism At this second cognitive phase, participants attempt to work within the team to achieve the goals of the project. They are still seeing things from familiar perspectives based on previous experience and their own businesses. They are likely to attempt to manage the team with a sense of having needed expertise, but are not yet aware of the expertise within the team and among the team members. The team is seen as a number of individuals who can divide the work that needs to be done, but the team is treated as an extension of themselves operating alone to accomplish the project. The team is not viewed as a unique social entity with its own potential and limitations. Difficulties working together at this point will probably be viewed as unresolved issues of who is going to run the group, who is able to support the individual's own efforts and who is going to be an impediment, and who is a competitor. Individuals are competing with *their* solutions to the problem as *they* define it.

Organization	Behavioral Examples
Major Food Organization	During a stop/reflect the following dialogue took place in reference to one member simply asserting control of the group during a meeting with the sponsor: 1st speaker: Your process was good in getting us started. We got some direction , but don't make it a pattern. 2nd speaker: Use brainstorming to give us equal time. 3rd speaker: I agree with brain-storming. 4th speaker: We must make choices in how we work.
Automotive Manufacturing Organization	"After the first week, it wasn't anything to survive anymore, it was something to gain from and to learn from and to experience. Then you saw it as a gift you were given, not to use for a cheap return, but to actually use it to enrich your own style, your own way of doing business" "You just started pulling together to get something done. It's kind of like an atheletic event or something. If you suddenly get into a relay race, the closer you are to running with a baton,

	the more focused you are on the job at hand and not so many peripheral things that you might be imagining on the side."
Major Utilities Organization	A team had both management and bargaining unit employees. Management and union have a historically adversarial relationship. As a consequence of three stop and reflect sessions during some difficult times during the group process, there was a growing cognizance of how the inherent adversarial relationship between these two groups interferes with their problem solving abilities. Reflection from one member of management is as follows: "We did three stop and reflects during the meeting. We were able to go over what we accomplished. Really making an effort on listening skills and being open to new ideas. Still have some split between management and union. Feel if one side says something, the other side needs to say something in their defense." Reflection from one union member is as follows: "Hard work, different opinions. People are still defending their territory. Still a concrete barrier."
Financial Institution	"There's a question about how we're going to work as a team, a split camp...we're just going to have to see who gives in." "(I) have a compelling sense of responsibility to share with my team...to be a leader." "I'm finding I'm uncomfortable. I like to be out front and in-charge."

Phase Three - Team Focused Team Membership In this phase of cognitive framing individuals begin to question the ways in which they have been attempting to work in their teams and with which they have been approaching their project tasks. Rather than competing to solve the team task as individuals managing the cooperation and work of others, they begin to pool ideas and insights into a social collaboration which is the property of the team, and not the manifestation of dominating individuals. They also begin to attend to the issues that impede their ability to interact effectively as a team. In this phase, participants are more likely to listen to feedback on how they are, or are not, impacting others, and they are more likely to be receptive to observations of other team members as to whether they are behaving in accordance with agreed upon team norms. Team members are more likely to tell others that they are not satisfied with a situation, or that they feel another team member's behavior is helpful or harmful to themselves or to the team's progress and ability to work together. They are taking the team and its interaction process much more seriously, and are likely to be highly committed to working well as a member of the team, rather than viewing themselves as individuals with separate agendas and interests.

Organization	Behavioral Examples
Major Food Manufacturing Organization	1st person: We had a misunderstanding yesterday, but were comfortable we could handle it...there was enough trust to understand why things are being said. 2nd person: I think we need a little R&D on our performance the last few days at the beginning

	of the next project day.
Automotive Manufacturing Organization	"Then at the end of the week, because of the closeness, you basically spent 24 hours a day with these people and you had a team mission you were given, and you had some team successes and failures that you shared, now you all of a sudden feel that you're part of something. That's not just an extension of what you usually do, it's something that's a thing of its own. It has a life and value of its own, and then you start maximizing what you're putting in and taking out of that thing...It tends to make you *abandon self*." "The most valuable lesson that I have learned in my team experience is that not everybody is geared and wired the same way I am...You have to take time to recognize the other people, not so much in terms of their job or their experience or what they seem to know about the topic, but the way they are as people and what their values are and how you communicate to them.
Major Utilities Organization	Participants establish personal learning goals that they work on during the program—both in their action learning teams and back at the job. When one participant set a goal, he talked about being uncomfortable in praising and reinforcing his people for the work that they did. His expectation was that if he praised them for their work, the result would be that they would think that they must do enough if the work is worthy of praise and would "slack off" and do less...In between action learning meetings, the participant committed to take advantage of a visit from an executive to his group as an opportunity to provide positive feedback...In reporting back, he had not done what he said he would do, that his personal learning goal was important, but not "tattooed on his head". One of his team mates reflected that "praise will achieve higher results". During the final reflection of the day, the participant said that the idea that praise may encourage greater performance was a completely new way of looking at the idea for him and at the final session said that was one of his greatest learnings.
Financial Organization	"I think about the first week, yeah, you could have faked it. And I think we all, I don't know, faked it to some extent, but by the third one, you start to know each other, you start to get more comfortable. People start giving you honest feedback."

Oscillations Between Cognitive Frame Levels: a learning dynamic

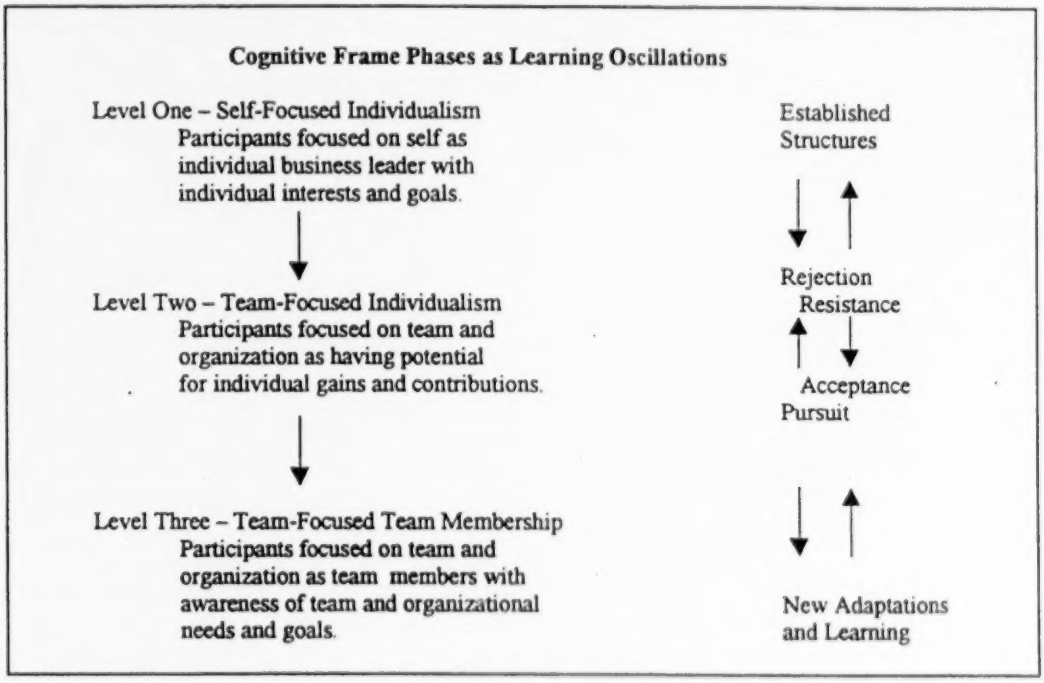
The progression between cognitive frame phases does not occur in a smooth linear fashion. Instead, behaviors oscillate between the three phase typifications, with cognitive level emphasis occurring in the order suggested. This oscillating behavior is felt to be necessary to the learning that is taking place. If we accept learning to be a purposeful interpretation of experience and integration of interpreted experiences into a cognitive framework for making sense out of, and acting in, the world around us, then we need a model of team learning that is more complex that a linear skill-transfer process. Observations in the studies included in this paper show that team members are likely to oscillate between various sets of norms, experiential bases, and tentative behavior attempts, some held previously and others being of recent exposure. The oscillations amount to testing and establishing the fit of new data with existing frames for defining the situation and organizing behavior. This testing, like interpersonal conflict, explores and establishes applications and boundaries for situational definitions and behaviors.

Organization	Behavioral Examples
Major Food Manufacturing Organization	1st person: We are in a struggle. Making false assumptions. I've communicated my needs and it just plops. I feel a lot of pressure that I am the one holding up the group. 2nd person: We are not making a lot of progress. Not addressing each others' needs...I feel a tension in myself that we will have a million things to do. "We had an up and down week, but we reformed well in Dijon. We got ahead of ourselves, had conflict and had to go back and reform...last night was good giving some more feedback." (referring to having dinner together and discussing their process very seriously.)
Automotive Manufacturing Organization	"Learning how to work with different types of individuals (on the project team) was extremely beneficial, so don't try to deal with the group as your team, try to deal with each person on that team in a way that brings out the best in them. ...(T)his is still America. It's still a very competitive, individualistic environment. And, at the end of the day, it's still the way people are going to be measured and rewarded. I for one am not willing to give up that or to put that at risk just because I think there is a better system if I'm not going to be around to reap the fruits."
Major Utilities Organization	"...(an issue came up) and normally I would have gone "toe-to-toe", but I listened closely to understand, and let him finish what he was saying. In the past, I would have been too anxious to get my voice heard to listen to another person's story. This time I backed up, slowed down and listened before I spoke. "
Financial Institution	Initially, a team member suggested that all four teams should make an opportunity to get together in order to share findings and help each other. In a later oscillation team members

	suggested a need to communicate with other teams in order to ensure that ..."*no one is saying anything that will raise problems elsewhere.*"

Analysis and Conclusions

Learning in an action learning program typically involves oscillation between conflicting cognitive frames used to interpret situations and construct behavior. These oscillations are not aberrations in an otherwise linear process, but rather the individual and social attempt to try out and establish fit between competing frames. Initially, team members act as individuals with a set of personal interests and concerns. In the second phase, they recognize a need to perform within the group, but they attempt to apply individual perceptions of how the group ought to be going about its business. In the third phase, participants begin to understand and give priority to the needs and goals of the group and to others as members of the group. They also see the group as representing a broad range of resources. This model is offered as a framework for future HRD research, theory and practice.


Cognitive Frame Phases as Learning Oscillations
Level One – Self-Focused Individualism
Participants focused on self as individual business leader with individual interests and goals.
Level Two – Team-Focused Individualism
Participants focused on team and organization as having potential for individual gains and contributions.
Level Three – Team-Focused Team Membership
Participants focused on team and organization as team members with awareness of team and organizational needs and goals.
Established Structures
Rejection
Resistance
Acceptance
Pursuit
New Adaptations and Learning

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